

COMMUNITY SURVEY

Community participation and interest in park and recreation services offered by the City of San Antonio was evaluated using both a formal survey and information gathered at public meetings. The survey, conducted in early 1996, was designed and conducted prior to initiation of the 1997 Park System Plan. It addressed only recreation programs and facilities. Survey responses were statistically reflective of the City's demographic profile, and results were aggregated city-wide.

Information about both park and recreational facilities was gathered in meetings held during the initial public input process for the 1997 plan. The 1996 recreation survey data was used to supplement this input, and the results, together with comments gathered in four public meetings held in November 1997, were used in formulating the needs assessment portion of the 1997 Park System Plan.

Needs Assessment Survey of Recreation Functions (1996)

The Parks and Recreation Department retained Leonard Ehrler and Associates and Management Learning Laboratories in 1996 to conduct a needs assessment study of the City's recreation functions. The goal of the study was to assist the Department in formulating goals and policies for its recreation program and in developing future programs and facilities.

A survey instrument designed by the consultants working with City staff and community focus groups questioned respondents about use of discretionary time, existing and future recreation facilities and programs, public outreach, and suggestions for improving service.

Findings

While the 1996 survey addressed only recreational interests of residents and did not ask questions related to park usage, it does provide valuable information about user preferences.

Survey results assessing current facilities and programs indicated that respondents had a high level of interest in several in fitness-related activities (i.e. walking and swimming) as well as arts and crafts-related activities (i.e. dance). Lighted fields and walkways elicited a 92% level of interest, followed by equipped playgrounds (88%); jogging trails (87%); and bicycle paths (86%), and walking (80%).

Likewise, when asked about future improvements, respondents' expressed preferences for walking and jogging trails, new aquatic facilities, and multi-

purpose recreation centers with facilities for both fitness and sports activities and arts and crafts.

When asked for their personal opinions, respondents' indicated the need for:

- better marketing of Department activities
- safety and security at Department facilities
- modern equipment
- better maintenance of facilities
- equitable recreation opportunities for all San Antonians.

Public Input Process (1997)

The Parks and Recreation Department staff initiated public input for its 1997 Parks System Plan by conducting ten public meetings in June and July 1997, one held in each of ten planning subareas. Meeting participants were asked to provide information about their facility and program preferences using the same ranking process included in the 1996 recreation survey. Additional verbal and written comments were also solicited, and participants were urged to ask other interested individuals to submit their comments to the Parks and Recreation Department. Final input was received in four public meetings held in November 1997. The resulting data, though not scientifically gathered, provides responses specific to the Park System Plan subareas. This additional information provides insight into the preferences of subarea residents and users and trends in recreation activities.

Findings

Responses received in public meetings and in questionnaires returned after these meetings reinforced the public's interest in walking and jogging trails. Respondents stressed the need for more natural resource areas and the desire to leave existing parks (or portions of these parks) in a more natural state. Preferred activities included walking, hiking, and nature observation. Public meeting participants completing the 1996 recreation survey form supplemented their responses with comments indicating strong interest in individual and informal group pursuits as opposed to more organized, formal recreational activities.

The responses received through the Recreation Needs Assessment Study and public meetings have all been considered in assessing city-wide and subarea needs and in formulating recommendations.